COUNTRY LIFE IN FAR HAWAII NEI

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The 11 a. m. train from Honolulu steams along the narrow gauge road that runs close beside the rough coral and lava shore, down the steep grade past the "Barking sands," by some half-dozen tiny wooden houses, one church and an equally tiny whitewashed box of a school, and stops for me to get off at Makua. Immediately I am surrounded by a score of hilarious children, natives and half-whites, fresh from their bath in the ocean, their hair and bare brown feet still wet and sticky with sand. They wear as to the girls, the hideous holoku, in dark calico—the boys Japanese shirts and overalls; one girl even boasts a pair of haole boots, but no stockings. One seizes my coffee bottle, another my lunch, and so back along the track we go to school. It is a special privilege I have, this of coming on the first train, as in previous years what teachers Makua has had rode eight miles from the nearest plantation village, over a hot, sandy road, to begin school at the conventional hour of 9. I commence at 11:15, and with a half-hour at 1, close on the approach of the last train at 3:30 p. m.

Makua is so off the map that outside of one very much nativized white man, there are none but natives and a few Japs and Chinese, who live in this cool valley of the Waianae mountains. Consequently when I took the school the official in the department of education told me to make my aim the proper use of the English language. As the children were all said to talk some English, I felt this an easy task when I opened school the 10th of September. It is a little whitewashed shed, just large enough for my table and chair and the benches for the twenty children. Close beside it is the belfried church where service is held once a month or so. "What kind of a church?" I asked. "Oh, just plain Christian," said the native, little realizing how delightfully broad this sounded to my cosmopolitan ears, tired with the jangle of the sects. And yet when one boy at Christmas asked me if I had ever seen Jesus Christ, I wondered what the missionaries had meant these churches for. I soon found the English these twenty juveniles knew was the use of all the worst and lowest words in our most expressive mother tongue, and such phrases as, "I been go to one school bif-fore." When I talked they apparently listened attentively, but on questioning found but few of my words conveyed their real meaning to these coffee-colored, big-eyed children, ranging from 15-years-old Lupua Kaanaana to 5-years-old Mikala Kaiama.

My work was confined to oral instruction and blackboard work, as the authorities told me to ask for as few supplies as possible, and they also said, "Your one difficulty will be to get your pupils to eat enough before school to keep them awake till 1." So each day I ask, "Who has not eaten this morning?" and the culprit is then sent home to eat. This I seldom have to order, as to go home from the wahine haole, that is, white woman, school means "a licking" from the mother or father, all of whom are nobly assisting me in my task of teaching true discipline. Oftentimes to make the children talk I ask, "What did you have to eat this morning?" Abraham always says, "Crabs and salt fish." Mikala is, I fear, inventive, as she glibly spins out, "Coffee, pancakes, poi, fish, rice, sugarcane and crackers," as this list includes all the usual articles of food eaten in a day.

They are a most amusing crew, these twenty children, but few of whom have ever been to Honolulu, forty miles by rail, and nearly half not even to the nearest plantation village. Can one fancy trying to explain what a city is when only six have seen a city, and this with only 35,000 or 40,000 inhabitants? To make them think of size or depth when their horizon is bounded on one side by the shining ocean, that is deep, "so deep you drown," and on the other by the mountains, whose steep, volcanic sides offer no attraction to even a hardy mountain climber, much less to these indolent people, whose wants are all supplied when they have a house in which to sleep if it rains, poi, the universal dish made from taro, the ocean from whence to get their fish, crabs and limu, a species of seaweed, and a few convenient pigs, cows and horses? Sometimes it seems a hopeless task to make them comprehend certain words, these children of a bountiful land. I told them one day of the famine in India, that because of no rain there was no food and no cattle, and that more people died of hunger in a few months than lived in all these islands. "Why don't they eat poi, catch fish, shoot goats, eat limu?" They hurled one question after another, and though I carefully explained the conditions, I saw when I had done a look of incredulity that showed they thought famine was only another of those startling haole tales, like the famous one of the 20-story building with elevators which run like express trains up to the top. This last item had been received with laughter and cries of delight at my ability as an entertainer!

In explaining "rich" the other day, one girl itemized the expenses of herself and father for me to show $500 was "too much": "Poi $2.50 a week, crackers $1 a month, flour $12 a year, gin $50 a year, her clothes, a holoku and muumuu 50 cents a month, for her father $35 a year, condensed milk $24 a year," in all not $300 a year. Coffee they gather themselves from the old trees in the valley, tobacco they grow and dry at home, fish and aqueous dainties to be had for the catching.

One noon I went to a nearby house to see that "the wriggling eel," as I dub the 9-years-old son of a native, had enough to eat to keep him awake till the close of school. I found him squatting in front of his stove on the sand under the kiawe tree, frying griddle cakes. This sounds so absurd, I hasten to say his stove is a kerosene oil can, the top cut out and another opening in the side into which he thrust dry twigs from the kiawe or algaroba tree, that blessing of the lowlands. He fried, tossed and browned them with the air of a chef, as he passed them to his guests. And this was his dinner! And yet his father is not at all poor, often earning $50 a month diving for "wana," a crustaceous delicacy greatly prized at the native feast. This child finds it impossible to stand quietly while reciting or even to sit on the remarkably uncomfortable bench. So I gain my end, peace, punishing him by making him sit on the floor beside me. One can hardly deem it a punishment as he curls himself contentedly into the true native pose and is thereafter quiet.

One day on my arrival I was greeted by the news Lupua's uncle had died and would be buried at noon in the graveyard close beside the school. Oh, how I wished I had never opened school, as one by one tired heads drooped and big eyes grew dim. As a rule, this means lack of breakfast, and the sleepy one is sent home to eat. But no, they had all eaten. Then I found that one and all had been to the "polealea," similar to the Irish wake. The children's translation is "a happy time," for the wailing is interrupted by eating, drinking, singing and dancing, which program is kept up till morning dawns. At 2 I dismissed school, as the coffin brought that morning from Honolulu was borne to the grave by the native men. Women of all degrees of adiposity, clad in the dress designed by the missionaries, the holoku, followed, chatting and laughing. A short prayer in native was said by the oldest son and then one by one the natives passed the open grave, dropping a flower and a stone on the coffin for the peaceful resting of the departed. On the children's return to school I asked why they staid all night and did not go home to get some sleep. "'Fraid," they all replied in thrilling tones. "Of what?" said skeptical I. "Ghosts," said they. And when I asked how many had ever seen a ghost my skepticism was unavailing, as I saw nearly every hand raised. One boy volunteered the information he had seen the late departed's ghost, "Tall and all in white." Of course, there is real grief at some beloved one's death, for on Hawaii I met a native man who, crazed by his young daughter's death, had refused consolation and for days at a time would sit on a rock by the ocean wailing and refusing nourishment. But as a rule the native grief is not deep and shows the childlike characteristics of the race.

One peculiar quality of the children's minds is the ability to memorize words which convey no meaning to their intelligence. When I began to teach them "Hiawatha" I gave them the lines to learn:—

Downward through the evening twilight
In the days that are forgotten.

and the following four lines as an experiment, simply pronouncing the words, with no explanation. The next day these six unintelligible lines were repeated correctly; but, oh, the lightening of faces when I explained carefully the meaning. Talk of lotus blossoms and poppy flowers, of a soft haze on a shimmering sea to produce a torpid condition! Why, all I have to do is to speak gently the magic word arithmetic to see every muscle grow limp and dull, unseeing eyes. I defy the professors of mathematics in all the eastern colleges to hold these children's attention more than 10 minutes.

To them singing is the one unmixed joy of school life. When the term opened their repertoire of English songs were "Toiling on," "Casting all," "To the work" and "Kiawe tree." These are the titles they gave. Besides these they knew innumerable and unending hulas, as the native song and dance is termed. The dance is that interesting one "where the ladies move their belts," as a young man politely described the Hawaiian "danse du ventre." The songs are nearly all so bad as to be untranslatable, though the airs are beautiful.

Their knowledge of geography was startling in the extreme. In mentioning cities, London, Paris and New York brought not a gleam to their questioning eyes. But when I casually mentioned St. Louis and Milwaukee, their faces brightened. Oh, yes, they all knew those places. Why? Simply—oh ye shades of missionaries departed—because special brands of beer were made there. Of course, this little school must not be thought of as a sample one, for nearer Honolulu and in the city the schools compare most favorably with those of the far East. It is only in the districts far away from the influence of the better class of whites that the native Hawaiians are still living very near to their primitive life. It is a terrible fact to realize that it is the vileness of our white brothers that is adopted by these children of a civilization not 100 years old. It is only when one meets a refined, highly-bred Hawaiian, polished by travel and eastern schools, that one can see the power for good we Americans have over the tractable native.

In some ways it seems a hopeless task to permanently influence these children, so utterly devoid of morality, few of whose parents speak English, and whose environment gives them little chance to come in contact with the better class of haoles, as the white race is termed. But always before my mind is the knowledge of the progress of the Hawaiian people in 100 years, and that even in this small way I am helping to the upward life one of the kindliest peoples on this fair earth.